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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 05 BAGHDAD 004841

SIPDIS

STATE FOR INR/R/MR, NEA/PPD, NEA/PPA, NEA/AGS, INR/IZ, INR/P

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: IRAQI GOVERNMENT, DECEMBER 15th ELECTION, TRANSPARENCY, U.S. MILITARY PLANTING STORIES IN THE IRAQI MEDIA; BAGHDAD

SUMMARY: Today's major editorial theme was split between widespread coverage of the American military's placement of stories in the Iraqi press and continuing coverage of electoral issues.

Analysis: Independent Az-Zaman published a page-three column, "Az-Zaman Cannot Be Seduced Or Threatened" which was highly critical of the U.S. military's involvement in the "scandal" of publishing unattributed, pro-American stories in the Iraqi press. The newspaper described the act as "a stigma on the forehead of the occupation."

Independent Ad-Dustoor's front-page editorial by Editor-in Chief Bassim Al-Sheikh was entitled, "Advertising and the Media" and took a defensive tone coupled with a slightly broader attack, accusing much of the Western media of defaming the Iraqi press and even complicity in the scandal merely by virtue of how it's treated the Iraqi media.

On a different topic, independent Al-Mada's back-page column entitled, "The Mercy of Reduction" dealt with the upcoming election and how the Iraqi people are still suffering daily from crises and problems committed during the current and former governments.

Independent As-Sabah Al-Jadeed's front-page editorial highlighted the results of the Cairo Conference and how the Iraqi people are waiting for reconstruction, progress and rapprochement following the election.

Al-Adala continues publishing editorials on pages 4, 6, 7 about the political and electoral process in general and also about the UIA's list. Baghdad also continues to dedicate a back-page column to speaking about the Iraqiya National List No. 731

KDP affiliated At-Taakhi published a front-page editorial entitled, "Kurdistan's Society is Rich Due to Its Unity" where the writer criticized those who are trying to gain the votes of Shiite Kurds by employing sectarian slogans. The writer argued that the Shiite (Faili) Kurds will defend their rights because first and foremost they are Kurds.

Al-Ittihad published a page-three column entitled "Kurdistan Coalition List (730) is a List For All Iraqis" that dealt with preparations for the upcoming election and the importance of all Iraqis voting for list 730 because "it will satisfy all wishes and interests of Iraqis."

Independent Al-Mashriq distributed "The Eyes of the Voter," an eight-page electoral supplement with the newspaper which contains editorials about the upcoming election. Other newspapers (i.e. Ad-Dustoor, As-Sabah, and As-Sabah Al-Jadeed) are also publishing electoral supplements which have been less news-driven and more public service oriented. END SUMMARY.

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SELECTED COMMENTARIES

- [1A. "Even You?"
\(Asharq Al-Awsat - independent, London-based, Saudi owned, Pan-Arab, no bias, published this page-eight editorial by Tarik Al-Hameed\)](#)

"The Los Angeles Times' report on the U.S. military paying

Iraqi papers to write pro-American articles indicates what I call polluted democracy. What is the difference between the U.S. forces and the dictator Saddam's regime? Saddam oppressed and tyrannized inside Iraq and domestic media outlets praised him. At the same time, he paid those who were outside of Iraq to polish his image.

"We heard General Rick Lynch, the U.S. forces spokesperson in Iraq, say that Al-Qaeda considers media half the battle, but did Al-Qaeda push the Americans to adopt the same style as Saddam? If we understand that the media is half the battle, can we justify lying? I think we have a lot of liars in the world--we also have writers who write as a business. We have authors who write because they believe that media is a sacred jihad.

"In fact, media outlets that sympathize with Al-Qaeda are not the press. Therefore, buying a news report from the Americans in an attempt to improve their image is similar to burying nuclear waste in our region. We have a lot of problems and we do not need the Americans to increase these problems. If we want to improve America's image among Iraqis, we should avoid making haphazard mistakes in Iraq.

"We say to the Americans that they should not spoil the democracy they established in Iraq. Improving the image of America does not come from buying media outlets. In fact, it comes through adopting transparency, supporting a free press and providing freedom for conveying facts without any interference. But, if the Americans want to establish another bombastic press in the region, we would say to them 'even you'."

1B. "Advertising and the Media"
(Ad-Dustoor - independent, no bias, published this front-page editorial by Bassim Al-Sheikh)

"The feverish western media outlets have defamed and accused the Iraqi press of publishing reports and this reflects the shining face of the 'occupation' or the 'multi-national forces' as those who oppose or support its presence label them. If we want to be neutral, we should call these forces foreign troops. It seems western media have forgotten that any paper has the right to publish ads. Usually, Iraqi newspapers publish ads and they indicate that these items are ads and do not necessarily represent the newspaper's viewpoint.

"All Iraqi newspapers publish ads that call for Iraqis to promote peace, love and safety. These published articles clearly represent ads and they have nothing to do with affiliations or loyalties. On the other hand, when newspapers publish ads, they are not responsible for the influence [created by] publishing those ads.

"We know for sure that the leak of information about this issue is a result of American political and economic disagreements. However, we will not let the sensationalist American press defame our national media outlets. Our media outlets rely on professionalism, rules, and are committed to journalism's code of honor. We do not care about the American factions or if they did not benefit from deals, which are held under the guise of the media. I think this is an American affair that Iraqis have nothing to do with. Iraqi journalists know better how to discriminate between advertising and media."

1C. "Allawi Outside of the Electoral Game"
(Al-Bayan - affiliated with Ad-Dawa (led by Al-Ja'fari), no bias, published this page-three editorial by Zainab Al-Khafaji)

"Iraqi National List leader Iyad Allawi recently paid a visit to a military camp and attended a military parade. This act has nothing to do with the electoral campaign and in fact, this behavior violates the government's responsibility. The electoral competition must be ruled by ethics and values.

"Allawi's recent statements in front of the Iraqi Army's parade have caused confusion in the electoral competition and are distant from the rules of the electoral game. These statements accused Al-Ja'fari's government of disregarding human rights. At this point, Allawi must present strong proof to support his accusations. I think that Dr. Iyad Allawi should have analyzed his statements well before he announced them. He should have condemned armed terrorist groups and regional countries that support them instead of standing against Al-Ja'fari's government.

"Iyad Allawi should not have criticized the government's military triumphs against terrorism. In fact, Allawi's accusation may confuse the Iraqi community because Iraqi voters must not be concerned about details of military issues that have nothing to do with the electoral process. I think that Allawi has made a political mistake by making

such a statement. It is not right to randomly accuse others in an attempt to make electoral gains because this is not democracy. Allawi and other competitors should focus on one important issue in their electoral campaign and that is the interest of the country."

"[Congressman] Murtha and Kerry weep for the sake of the American Democratic party and they want to hinder the 'lame duck' by calling for early withdrawal from Iraq. However, Bush laughs for the sake of America and for the sake of staying in the White House just as Reagan did in order to achieve 'complete victory' in Iraq."

1D. "Az-Zaman Cannot Be Seduced or Threatened"
(Az-Zaman - independent, published this page-three editorial)

"We consider the scandal of the U.S. military's involvement in publishing articles as publicity for it in the Iraqi newspapers, a stigma on the occupation's forehead. It seems that the U.S. army wants to humiliate the independent national Iraqi press through buying the dignity of unprofessional journalists. The occupation has brought unprincipled journalists and established false press platforms for them to convey amateurish reports. In addition, these reports lacked patriotism. The occupation tried to use these reports to affect the Iraqi national press. At the same time, the occupation tried to fight the Iraqi national press by providing and allocating funds and places for those unprofessional media outlets.

"The newspaper Az-Zaman has always watched these attempts, which represent a significant insult to the independent Iraqi press. We refused to publish any suspected article or report. Additionally, we refused many ads for famous companies because we discovered that these companies propagandize for the same reason. For all those reasons, our newspaper has become an example for credibility and professionalism. Our newspaper is honored for not being involved in this crisis. Thus, Az-Zaman has set an example for the national press that refuses submission to any group. Our newspaper cannot be seduced and there is nothing it fears but God and the people.

"Az-Zaman represents an example for independence and it succeeded in distancing itself from the occupation's traps and its tricks to gain influence in the new Iraqi press. We believe that the U.S. army and any other group involved in this scandal threatens the Iraqi media's independence and the honor of journalism. At the same time, we condemn and totally reject these practices. Az-Zaman calls on Iraqi journalists to be wary of tricks and traps that they may fall into. In addition, it warns advertising companies not to fall into the traps of the occupation. Az-Zaman is proud to resist all these methods because it is free from pressures, threats and seduction."

1E. "Honesty Is Rare In Our Country"
(As-Sabah Al-Jadeed - independent, no bias, published this front-page editorial by Ismail Zayyer)

"I saw a phrase on one of the electoral list posters that says, 'seven months of achievements and more are coming.' Neither I nor any Iraqi has the right to object to the way candidates portray their electoral campaigns, because democracy allows any way of doing so, but without insulting other candidates or hurting the public. But the question is, what are the achievements during the past seven months that some candidates are promising to provide us with more? If the water and electricity shortages, deterioration of security, and the shortages of food items in the ration share, destruction of Iraqi cities, assassination of scientists and teachers are considered achievements then congratulations to the Iraqis, because more of these achievements will come in the next stage.

"For me, I will vote for whoever will clean the streets simply because whoever propagates such a slogan is considered the only one who is honest, because he knows his abilities in advance. He would be certain that he is unable to provide security, or to elevate the rule-of-law above all else, unable to provide job opportunities or to feed the hungry people under these complicated and difficult circumstances.

"Vote for whomever will deal with the sewage, bring order to the traffic, cancel the fuel lines through provisions, because that person is the only honest one among others who make promises bigger and grander than this."

1F. "About the Los Angeles Times Article"
(Al-Mada - independent, no bias, published this front-page editorial by the paper's editorial board)

"A Los Angeles Times reporter interviewed the managing editor and employees of our newspaper but, the Los Angeles Times reporting was distorted-it asserted there are some

Iraqi newspapers that publish articles about military operations. Al-Mada thinks that this story represents one point of view and that most of the sources for these reports are not mentioned. For this reason we do not deal with such stories, because our newspaper respects its professional policy and our readers should get accurate information

"The Los Angeles Times report was distorted because it did not publish the whole interview. Al-Mada newspaper stated that it refuses to accept money for publishing ads or articles. At the same time Al-Mada has editorialized more than once on its front page about the disclosure and the condemnation of many advertisements that lack clear motives and sources.

"Here we confirm that the Los Angeles Times report included distorted information, which is distinct from our policies and goals. We as a newspaper depend on professionalism and we reiterate that we are committed to our fixed policies. We also reject all types of 'support and grants' from any foreign entities whatever their motives might be.

"Finally we ask the Los Angeles Times to publish this comment in its next edition in order to explain the facts and to be committed to the principles of journalism."

1G. "The Lame Duck and the Strategy of Withdrawal"
(Al-Ittihad - affiliated with the PUK, led by Jalal Talabani, pro-coalition, published this page-five editorial by Faryad Rawanduzi)

"With the beginning of the second year of the second presidential term for the American President George Bush in the White House, the president now enters the 'lame duck' stage. In this stage, leaders do not hesitate to implement their dream even if this dream will cost them their political life.

"President Bush put an end to the likelihood of an early withdrawal from Iraq in spite of the Democrats and the pressures of some Republican doves. But, if Bush is now in 'lame duck' mode, this will not belittle pressures to establish an American strategy to withdraw U.S. forces from Iraq. Therefore, Bush's plan to withdraw may not meet with other politicians' plans. Such plans were adopted by the Democratic Senator Joseph Biden and the hawkish Democrat Murtha's plans to withdraw from Iraq even if this withdrawal would be at the expense of 'victory.'

"Henry Kissinger believes that any thinking about withdrawal from Iraq represents a 'disaster.' President Bush knows this fact. As long as President Bush is a 'lame duck,' he will have nothing to lose. If he withdrew from Iraq according to his opponents' strategies, he would lose everything. Hence, the 'lame duck' stage indicates that President Bush will not withdraw according to Democratic wishes. In fact, the withdrawal will be accomplished according to his plans."

KHALILZAD